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1 JSC Director George Abbey and the STS-90 crew, from left Payload Specialists Jay Buckey and Jim Pawelczyk, Payload Commander Rick Searfoss, Commander Rick Linnehan, Mission Specialists Kay Hire and Dave Williams and Pilot Scott Altman, recite the pledge of allegiance with students from Westwood Elementary School, who adopted the Neurolab mission in their studies.

2 Westwood Elementary students pledge allegiance with the STS-90 crew and their friends, family and coworkers in Hangar 990 at Ellington Field.

3 Payload Specialist Jim Pawelczyk checks out a banner displayed at the homecoming ceremonies. The banner features cartoon characters "Pinky and the Brain" and a "Cranial Crusaders" logo in honor of the mission's research in to how the human brain and nervous system adapt to weightlessness. Several of the crew members sported temporary tattoos with the logo during the mission.

4 Payload Specialist Jim Buckey signs autographs for coworkers and children alike following the speeches at Ellington.



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JSC Photos by
Hector Gongora

Science *on the* Edge

Neurolab crew saw faces of support team whenever they broke out piece of equipment

By John Ira Petty

The seven STS-90 crew members were all smiles on their return to Ellington Field after the lengthy and demanding Neurolab flight, and full of gratitude to the many people who had helped make the mission a success.

"What an experience," said Columbia Commander Rick Searfoss.

JSC Director George Abbey began the May 4 ceremonies by welcoming the crowd, the crew and Westwood Elementary School students with their choir.

The Harmony Singers, 30 fourth graders from the Friendswood school that had "adopted" the STS-90 during the astronauts' training period, sang the National Anthem and two other songs inside Hangar 990 before Abbey turned the microphone over to Searfoss.

Searfoss praised his fellow crew members, saying they were world-class in their fields technically, great human beings, hard workers in sometimes trying situations. They also were "pleasant and fun to be around.... We were having a good time up there."

Searfoss had told the crew early in the flight that a gauge of how they were doing was whether they were having fun. "I think we maxed out that gauge and ... the science return and the overall mission objectives we achieved were very strong."

He cited the support of literally thousands of people—the mission control team, the science trainers and the orbiter crew trainers and the families who face daunting challenges and sacrifices behind crew members who are in a very demanding business.

Pilot Scott Altman seconded Searfoss in thanking those who had made the mission possible—including the Neurolab team, the training team, the rest of the crew and his understanding and supportive family. One of five crewmembers on their first space flight, he said he would never forget the first look out the window at the bright blue band of the Earth's atmosphere. "I felt very honored to be put in that place."

Mission Specialist Dave Williams said the cutting-edge science of Neurolab helps prepare for participation in the International Space Station. "It's going to be a really exciting era." The Canadian astronaut, who opened with brief greetings in English, French and Welsh, thanked those at the Canadian Space Agency in preparing him for the mission.

Kay Hire said it was an honor to

be a member not only of the crew but of the entire team. "The Neurolab mission has pushed forward the edge of science in space much further than we've ever been before," the mission specialist said. Much of the credit for the success of the lengthy mission goes to those in the welcoming crowd and to many other not able to be there, she added.

After thanking those at the ceremony for being there, Mission Specialist Rick Linnehan singled out the principal investigators for special thanks. He said they are true heroes for pushing the frontiers of medical science and research for the benefit of society. Neurolab was basic research. "We hope to use this information to build on what we've already learned and to improve the quality of human life on the planet. That's what NASA's about."

Payload Specialist Jim Pawelczyk said the experience of space flight and the experience of the Neurolab mission goes beyond words. Some crew members had trained for as long as two years. "It's been amazing to me to watch the process of bringing together so many of the faces we see here, so many of the faces at the other NASA centers," in this one defining moment, this mission, he said. He urged people at the ceremony to look around at those faces, "because it's really all of you that made this mission happen. We acted as your 'hands' in accomplishing the flight's scientific objectives."

"It was great flying on your mission," said Payload Specialist Jay Buckey. "This was a tremendous team effort, and in a way I think you all were there with us." He said that every time crew members took a piece of equipment from a locker, "we'd see the people who worked on it—people who'd made it, people who'd shown us how to use it, people who stowed it in that location." It was a tremendous group of people who made Neurolab happen, Buckey said.

He added that looking out a Columbia window at the Earth below, "you remember not to get jaded about space flight.... This is an amazing capability that we have." It's important, he said, to appreciate that we can do it, "that we've been able to work together to make it happen."

In conclusion, Abbey termed the mission historic. He said the interaction of the crew with the ground and the way the whole science program worked on Neurolab set an example for the way the agency and its partners around the world need to work together on the International Space Station. □